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## MARIA MITCHELL.

MARIA MITCHELL was born at Nantucket, Mass., August 1, 1818; she was the third child of William and Lydia C. Mitchell, her mother's maiden name having been Coleman. They were birthright members of the Society of Friends, and descended from such on both sides for several generations. Maria may well have inherited a taste and disposition for learning from a people whose fundamental "Discipline" as far back as 1695 included the equal education of both sexes and all classes. In 1737 it was "advised that Friends should instruct their children in French, High and Low Dutch, and Danish"; but this amendment to the "Discipline" (of English origin) was not suited to the wants of islanders far off in the Western Ocean; and so it came to pass that the Nantucket Quakers substituted for these languages some rudiments of the sciences, especially those related to navigation.

At the beginning of this century the Nantucket whalers ventured around Cape Horn, and stood out across the lonely Pacific Ocean, where every refinement of skill and intelligence in observations of the heavenly bodies was brought into requisition to trace their courses over vast regions never before traversed. The study of navigation became therefore the highest ambition of the Nantucket boy; and since this science involves mathematics and astronomy, it was broad enough to interest the other sex beyond the mere sympathy of common interests; and thus arose in this isolated community an intellectual excitement, the antithesis of its monotonous and repressive religious system. Maria's mother used to tell how in her infancy the little children were already taught to box the compass in the "Monthly Meeting School" in place of the Catechism; and her father boasted that in the short period of his direction of the Howard Street School he graduated two girls — one of whom was Maria's elder sister Sally — who made "graphical predictions" of the eclipse of 1831, then near at hand.

It was this annular eclipse, described in the next year's American Almanac as a "splendid spectacle," — "beautiful and sublime," — that first called in the services of Maria Mitchell, as appears from the accompanying fac-simile of her father's observations at Vestal Street.

We conjecture that the note signed "M. M." was added after her father's death, in 1869, at the time his papers were gathered up.

Professor Mary W. Whitney, the able associate and successor of Miss Mitchell at Vassar College, informs us that "the third return of the

*Wm. Mitchell*  
*Eclipse of 2<sup>nd</sup> mo 1831*

Time by clock	11.58.14	Clock too fast - 3.7"
Beginning - -		
Formation of ring	1.29.35	
Ruption of ring	1.31.17	
End of the Eclipse	2.55.42	
Duration of ring	1.42	
Duration - - -	- - -	

*Mean - Time-corrected*

Beginning -	11.55.07
Formation of ring	1.26.28
Ruption of ring	1.28.10
End of eclipse	2.52.35
Duration of ring - - -	1.42
Duration of Eclipse	2.57.28
$\frac{1}{2}$	11.55.07
	<hr/> 04.53
	2.52.35
	<hr/> 2.57.28

This time was noted by me;  
 I was  $12\frac{1}{2}$  years old. M. M.

eclipse, corresponding to this one during which she noted the time for her father, occurred fifty-four years later, and at that time she again sat by the chronometer and noted the seconds of beginning and end, as she had done for her father, now for her pupils."

These observations of the eclipse, made in concurrence with those of Paine at Monomoy and Bond at Dorchester, had for practical object the determination of the longitude of the house in Vestal Street where the chronometers of the whale-ships were carried to be rated and set to Greenwich time. Mr. Mitchell came in time to be the rater of all the chronometers of a fleet of ninety-two whale-ships, requiring observations on every fine day of the year. We mention this to indicate how accustomed his daughter must have been to the talk of astronomy, even as the source, in part, of her daily bread.

As Halley's Comet approached, in 1835, there was much anxiety to be foremost in the rediscovery. From Mr. Mitchell's note-books it would seem that it was first seen at Yale College, and next at Nantucket, while it was yet a very faint telescopic object. His daughter Maria, remembering all the excitement, never relinquished her father's claim to priority, as indicated by a note made by her on the margin of his journal not long before her death. "He [her father] was one of the first, if not the very first, to see Halley's Comet on its return in 1835. — M. M." Coming so near to priority served, as it proved, to give to the Vestal Street lookout the rank of an observatory, and introduced to the family valuable acquaintances among the rising astronomers.

At the time she assisted at the eclipse, Maria attended her father's school, and several of his pupils still live at Nantucket to bear witness to the enthusiasm which his teaching usually excited; but it was not till she was a pupil of Cyrus Peirce that she began to study in earnest. Father Peirce (as he was called many years later when he came to be the Principal of the first Normal School) had a natural genius for teaching, and a great many accomplished women now living found their earliest inspiration in his school. Maria remained with him two years, one as pupil and one as assistant teacher, and there began her mathematics and also began to develop that power of concentration of mind for which she became remarkable in later years.

The books in which her earliest notes appear are Bridge's "Conic Sections," Hutton's "Mathematics," and Bowditch's "Navigator." Some of the notices have spoken of her as backward in childhood upon her own authority; but the date of her review of the "Hyperbola" in Hutton is given on the margin, and makes her seventeen,

which shows that by that time she had caught up to or passed her contemporaries. She was not yet twenty when an effort was made to induce her to open a school for navigation. She declined, but whether constrained by her own fears or those of the underwriters we are not advised.

The "Navigator," or, as the whalers were prone to call it, the "Epitome," was the text-book of all the young men fitting to be whalers; but it was quite out of the question for any of these to comprehend the mathematics that lay hidden behind the practical formulas of navigation, Maria Mitchell, however, was not content with the letter, and undertook to reach the spirit of Bowditch's precepts. This was not an easy task in those days, before Professor Benjamin Peirce had published his "Explanation of the Navigator and Almanac," and she was obliged to consult many different scientific books and the reports of mathematical societies before she could herself construct the astronomical tables.

In 1836, her father became Cashier of the Pacific Bank and the family moved into the bank building on Main Street. The next year she was appointed Librarian of the Nantucket Athenæum, a position which she held for seventeen years. The library was open to the public only a few hours of each day, so that she had great opportunity for reading and study, with the best authorities in literature and science within reach. This library was destroyed by fire in 1846; but the disaster created so much interest in other portions of New England that means were soon supplied for building it up again, and the library to-day is really a better one than it ever was before, although it possesses fewer curious and original editions of old authors than formerly.

It was in this library that Miss Mitchell found Laplace and made a special study of Bowditch's Appendix to the third volume of the "*Mécanique Céleste*," which treats of the orbits of comets; and here, too, she read the "*Theoria Motus*" of Gauss in its original Latin form. This was at a progressive period in her father's scientific career, and his daughter contributed to his success by the most devoted assistance. She helped in the observations at all hours of the day or night that became necessary, and when her father was absent on lecturing or business tours she maintained the continuity of series of observations that he had undertaken. These two enthusiasts acquired gradually quite a well equipped observatory. Mr. Mitchell purchased an excellent telescope and a large celestial globe; many instruments were also loaned to him under obligations to supply data

for State or Government surveys. The State lent a transit for the meridian, West Point Academy sent a repeating circle, and the Coast Survey furnished an equatorial telescope and a transit instrument for the prime vertical, *the understanding being that the observatory at Nantucket should be one end of a great arc in the determination of the figure of the earth.*

Mr. Mitchell had enjoyed in his youth an acquaintance with many of the students of astronomy, and this acquaintance extended as the theme became more and more popular in our country. The observatory at Nantucket had the advantage, therefore, of personal visits from kindred spirits of the outside world; and as at this period Mr. Mitchell was appointed one of the Overseers of Harvard College and placed on the Observatory Committee (a portion of the time as Chairman), the little observatory at Nantucket was brought into intimate relations with the best of its kind in the country.

For several years father and daughter worked together on routine observations of the cumulative sort, much relied upon in those days as cancelling errors which modern improvements in instruments and methods have more effectually corrected. They observed moon culminations and occultations for longitude, and the transit of stars across the prime vertical for latitude, until, towards the last, they obtained a zenith telescope. The aspects of the planets, the solar spots, meteors, and auroral clouds, were observed diligently. But in 1845, when Smyth's "Celestial Cycle" (containing the Bedford Catalogue) appeared, they entered upon systematic studies of nebulae and double stars, using often the two telescopes side by side on the top of the Pacific Bank. Thenceforth they were prospectors beyond the frontiers; and routine work gave place to exciting explorations.

Many years after these explorations began, Miss Mitchell being a guest at St. John's Lodge, was asked by Admiral Smyth if his book had reached as far as Nantucket. She replied, "If it is a fine night at Nantucket, my father has your catalogue open upon the table, and runs in every few minutes from his telescope to identify his objects." The Admiral expressed his gratification at this homage, but remarked that his "forte" was poetry; and he gave her some verses printed upon a little press by himself, because, as he facetiously remarked, "*the publisher could not appreciate their merits.*" Those who are familiar with the Bedford Catalogue will remember "certain Brackish lines" and "Galley rhymes" mingling strangely with classical quotations. Miss Mitchell was lenient towards this kind of simplicity; she too had been prone to repeat verses, and even to compose very good

ones, as she awaited the transit of stars, *but she did not print them with her reports.*

Sweeping the heavens with the telescope through the long hours every clear night, as Miss Mitchell was wont to do, means healthy courage and hopes that prophesy success. A great many times she was deceived by the changes in the aspect even of familiar objects, and made measures in vain; but several new nebulous spots served to keep up her enthusiasm, and the discovery of three comets, not quite in time, but in advance of their announcements, excited expectation. Fortune favors the faithful; and in the autumn of 1847, a brand-new object entered the field of her telescope and was immediately "determined" in position. This object, being again observed on the following night, was found to be in motion among the stars, and, as it proved, was a comet not yet seen in any other part of the world.

In 1831, the same year that Maria Mitchell entered her astronomical apprenticeship as time-keeper at the "sublime" eclipse, Frederic VI., King of Denmark, at the suggestion of Professor Schumacher of Altona, founded a "gold medal of the value of twenty ducats to any person who should first discover a telescopic comet." This medal was awarded to Miss Mitchell, after considerable correspondence, conducted mainly by Hon. Edward Everett, whose "Introductory Note" to the letters, as finally compiled, reads as follows:—

"On the 1st of October, 1847, at half past ten o'clock, P. M., a telescopic comet was discovered by Miss Maria Mitchell of Nantucket, nearly vertical above Polaris about five degrees. The farther progress and history of the discovery will sufficiently appear from the following correspondence. On the 3d of October the same comet was seen at half-past seven, P. M., at Rome, by Father de Vico, and information of the fact was immediately communicated by him to Professor Schumacher at Altona. On the 7th of October, at twenty minutes past nine, P. M., it was observed by Mr. W. R. Dawes, at Camden Lodge, Cranbrook, Kent, in England, and on the 11th it was seen by Madame Rümker, the wife of the Director of the Observatory at Hamburg. Mr. Schumacher in announcing this last discovery observes, 'Madam Rümker has for several years been on the lookout for comets, and her persevering industry seemed at last about to be rewarded, when a letter was received from Father de Vico, addressed to the editor of this journal, from which it appeared that the same comet had been observed by him on the 3d instant at Rome.'

"Not deeming it probable that his daughter had anticipated the

observers of this country and Europe in the discovery of this comet, no steps were taken by Mr. Mitchell with a view to obtaining the King of Denmark's medal. Prompt information, however, of the discovery was transmitted by Mr. Mitchell to his friend, William C. Bond, Esq., Director of the Observatory at Cambridge. The observations of the Messrs. Bond upon the comet commenced on the 7th of October; and on the 30th were transmitted by me to Mr. Schumacher, for publication in the *Astronomische Nachrichten*. It was stated in the memorandum of the Messrs. Bond, that the comet was seen by Miss Mitchell on the 1st instant. This notice appeared in the *Nachrichten* of December 9, 1847, and the priority of Miss Mitchell's discovery was immediately admitted throughout Europe. . . .

"Mr. Fleniken entered with great zeal and interest into the subject. He lost no time in bringing it before the Danish government, by means of a letter to the Count de Knuth, the Minister at that time for Foreign Affairs, and of another to the King of Denmark himself. His Majesty, with the most obliging promptness, ordered a reference of the case to Professor Schumacher, with directions to report thereon without delay. Mr. Schumacher had been for a long time in the possession of the documents establishing Miss Mitchell's priority, which was indeed admitted throughout scientific Europe. Professor Schumacher immediately made his report in favor of granting the medal to Miss Mitchell, and this report was accepted by the King. The result was forthwith communicated by the Count de Knuth to Mr. Fleniken, with the gratifying intelligence that the King had ordered the medal to be awarded to Miss Mitchell, and that it would be delivered to him for transmission as soon as it could be struck off. This has since been done."

Among those who most promptly became Miss Mitchell's champions in this claim made for her by friends was Admiral Smyth, the same who had been her guide through the Celestial Cycle. Professor Schumacher, who had suggested the foundation of the medal, was also active in her behalf, and Madame Rümker sent congratulations. It seems probable that Miss Mitchell's failure to make any claim for herself, and the voluntary appearance of several distinguished champions, attracted the attention of European astronomers to the peculiar merits of the case. It was found that she was not only fully able to make all the observations and computations required for locating celestial objects, but that she could compute their orbits and predict their reappearance in our skies. The European astronomers came to feel a personal interest in her; and when, some years later, she



crossed the ocean, she became the honored guest of the most learned men in Europe, and visited all the observatories as a privileged inspector of their instruments and methods.

In Professor Joseph Henry's Report to the Regents of the Smithsonian Institution for the year 1849, we find the following in his review of communications: "The next memoir is an account of the discovery of a comet by Miss Maria Mitchell of Nantucket, with its approximate orbit, calculated by herself. The honor of this discovery has been duly awarded to the author. A gold medal has been awarded to her by the King of Denmark, and the comet is now known by her name to astronomers in every part of the world. From the peculiarities of the case the Executive Committee recommend that a small premium be presented to Miss Mitchell." This recommendation was adopted.

We have thought it only just to quote directly from the highest contemporaneous authorities concerning the importance of scientific work done a half-century ago, because the rapid progress of later years makes us liable, in retrospect, to look through the wrong end of the telescope.

On the 30th of May, 1848, Miss Mitchell was elected to the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, "unanimously," although she was the first and the only woman ever admitted. There is a tradition of the Academy, that at her election a serious discussion arose as to the propriety of calling her a *Fellow*; and in the diploma the printed word "FELLOW" is erased, and the words "Honorary Member" are inserted by Dr. Asa Gray, who signs the document as President. Some years later, however, we find her name in the list of Fellows of this Academy, of the American Institute, and of the American Association.

In the summer of 1849 she accepted an invitation from Professor Bache, then Superintendent of the United States Coast Survey, to take service in the astronomical party at Mount Independence, Maine, and as the guest of his family. This was a station in the chain of primary triangulation, and it lay so near the meridian of her observatory that it could be used in the measure of the proposed great arc extending northward from Nantucket. In the same year she was appointed one of the computers of the Nautical Almanac, receiving her initiative from Professor Benjamin Peirce. This office she held for nineteen years, and was mostly employed upon "Part II. The Astronomical Ephemeris for the Meridian of Washington," — the planet Venus being her particular assignment.

In the education of a pupil, the daughter of a Western banker, she was enabled to make a journey through the United States in 1853, and sailed for Europe the same year. This was her first going abroad, and friends on both sides of the water were determined that one so earnest and appreciative should have every opportunity the world could afford. She went accredited to distinguished women, as well as to distinguished men. She visited the great astronomers, not only at their observatories, but at their homes, and discovered a likeness among this sort of people everywhere, — a likeness that lay in the simplicity of their domestic lives, and in their elevation of thought. In short, she found what she went to seek, and what she went to carry, an appreciative sympathy.

It was in the course of this journey that she made an *inspection* of the Roman Observatory under a special dispensation which had been denied to others of her sex, including Mrs. Somerville and the daughter of Sir John Herschel. Soon after, she was made the recipient of the bronze medal of merit from the Republic of San Marino, together with the "Ribbon" and "Letters Patent" signed by the two Captains Regent. Some of the notes of this first European journey appear in the *Atlantic Monthly*, under the title of "A Visit to Mary Somerville," and others were published after her death in the *Century Magazine*, under the title of "Maria Mitchell's Reminiscences of the Herschels." On her return home from this journey, she received an excellent equatorial telescope, made by Alvan Clarke, and presented by Miss Elizabeth Peabody, "representing the women of America."

The years between 1857 and 1860 were the saddest of her life, and the most valuable in her manner of computing time; for these were years of watching and nursing the declining strength of her mother. She was alone with her parents, her sisters having married. This mother — who had formerly, in the midst of her large family, been a strong and steady principle, the source of its ambitious spirit, and the object of an affection that bound the children together as in a common cause — now gradually sank away, mind and body together, till her death took nothing out of the world except a precious and painful duty.

We ought perhaps to mention that Miss Mitchell's mother had been, for a brief period before her marriage, a teacher, as her mother before her had been. The only other in any sense *public* duty that had devolved upon her was, in later years, that of presiding "Clerk" of the Nantucket Monthly Meeting of Friends.

Miss Mitchell resigned her place in the Nantucket Athenæum in 1853, and after her mother's death, in 1861, she and her father moved from Nantucket to Lynn, where her sister was already settled, and where she was able to make a home for her father, now retired from business. She always spoke of this period of her life as dull and arid. She had lost a very dear occupation at the death of her mother, and for a while her enthusiasm for her scientific work seemed likely to give way. She was perhaps quite ready for a change in the routine of her life, when the opportunity for change offered itself.

In the year 1865 she was appointed Professor of Astronomy and Director of the Observatory at Vassar College. Although she had been consulted somewhat in the equipment of the observatory, the building was not what, in her mind, it should have been for the money expended, and she discovered in course of time that the serious tone of an institution of high learning had not been anticipated in its construction. It must be said, however, that the founder, Mr. Vassar, stood by her in every determined step that she took, and the very appreciative and far-sighted President, Dr. Raymond, satisfied the Trustees that the credit of the institution and its real usefulness could be guaranteed only by establishing its claims to scientific recognition, and that to this end the requirements necessary to admission to the observatory must be severe. And so it came to pass that Professor Mitchell's classes were small, and that from the outset a rigorous mathematical training accompanied the course, beyond the usual limits. Professor Whitney says: "The struggle between the desire to establish and maintain a truly collegiate standard, and the necessity of securing a sufficient number of pupils to meet the yearly expenses of the institution, began with the life of the College. That incubus upon college progress, a preparatory course school within its own walls, could not then be avoided. But I am happy to say that it has now passed out of existence."

Miss Mitchell's studies were not relinquished during these years of teaching, for she had a happy faculty of taking her pupils with her explaining to them abstruse points, and making them companions in the labor and the harvest; still, as Miss Whitney observes,—"It is possible that, had she determined to remain only an observer, she might have contributed more to the stock of astronomical knowledge, since the daily routine of class preparation and class work must very essentially curtail the night work of an astronomer. But," she continues, "I must believe that her choice was the wise one, and that what Vassar College has gained, and all the young women have gained

who have come under her influence, must far outweigh the possible increase in astronomical fact that might have followed from these twenty-three years, if devoted exclusively to the work of the telescope. Her interest in the physical peculiarities of the larger planets determined the lines of her observation at Vassar. Jupiter and Saturn were her favorite study. She published several papers on these planets, some printed in Silliman's Journal and some at her private expense. When photography became an important agent in the study of the solar surface, she constructed at her own cost the necessary apparatus for photographing the sun, and placed in the hands of older students, duly instructed in the process, the duty of taking sun pictures every clear noon. These records of the sun's condition, made by its own instantaneous impression, began as early as 1874."

Maria Mitchell was selected as President of "The American Association for the Advancement of Women," at the meeting in Syracuse of 1875, and again at the meeting in Philadelphia of 1876. And here again we discover a logical relation to the conditions of her early life. In what, long after, came to be called the "Woman's Movement," Miss Mitchell's mother had taken a decided interest, and lent to it her sympathy, at least to the extent that it sought to open to young women larger opportunities for earning their living by intelligent labor. It was, to this extent, in the very genius of Quakerism and consonant with its "Discipline." Miss Mitchell took many steps beyond her mother in this direction, but always with a quiet dignity that became one whose life presented an illustration of the loftiest purpose that the "movement" entertained.

Among her academic honors, she received her first degree, LL. D., from Hanover in 1853, and her last LL. D. from Columbia in 1887.

From the eloquent and sincere tribute paid to her memory by Dr. Taylor, the President of Vassar College, we quote the following as indicating the spirit of her example and teaching:—

"If I were to select for comment the one most striking trait of her character, I should name her genuineness. There was no false note in Maria Mitchell's thinking or utterance. Doubt she might, and she might linger in doubt, but false she could not be. Hers was a transparent character and her genuineness influenced her every word and deed. It was the key note of her independence; it was the deep source of her strength, and truth must be strong since God is truth. It was this perfect genuineness which gave her the strong hold she had on the admiration and affection of her students,—it was this in her which attracted most of those who loved her best. She fulfilled

the expectation of her friend, Dr. Channing, 'Worship God with what he most delights in, with aspiration for spiritual light and life.'

"But it would be vain for me to try to tell you just what it was in Miss Mitchell that attracted us who loved her; it was this combination of great strength and independence, of deep affection and tenderness, breathed through and through with the sentiment of a perfect life, which has made for us one of the pilgrim shrines of life the study in the Observatory of Vassar College, where we have known her at home surrounded by the evidences of her honorable professional career. She has been an impressive figure in our time, and one whose influence lives.

"This leads me to say a few words of her worth as a teacher. Her life became a strong influence in the lives of her devoted students. It was not that she impressed on them any peculiar views of hers; I have seen small evidence of that; but she wrought into their souls something of her own genuineness, her hatred for all shams in college, in social life, her love of truth, her honest search after it. Many are those who will carry her impress as long as they live, who gained from her a new inspiration, and who look back to that beautiful vine-clad observatory as a birthplace of new life in their souls. I feel the inadequacy of all I can say, as I think of the troop of young women grown to matronly dignity, teachers, wives, mothers, members of society, who would bid me say more, while she, in her simplicity of life and taste, would have me say far less.

"I have spoken as a friend of the traits of Maria Mitchell which have most impressed me in the three years of my close personal acquaintance with her. But I should not forget that I am the spokesman of others, of Trustees, and Faculty, and students of the College she served so faithfully. . . . A cloud of witnesses gathers about me, a great company of them have known and loved her, and have felt the power of her character and life."

Relative to the "doubts" referred to by Dr. Taylor, we remember them as self-conscious misgivings concerning another life. We do not remember that these misgivings ever included her father, whose cheerful faith and clear intellect, continuing to the last hour of his life, admitted only the transient shadow of an eclipse. Miss Mitchell once asked Mr. Whittier if he was perfectly confident of his immortality. The poet waived his own personal claims, and responded, "*I cannot conceive that the soul of Maria Mitchell can ever die.*"

After recording the generous appreciation that seemed to follow promptly upon every visible effort made by Miss Mitchell, and the

ample rewards she received, it would have been her wish, perhaps, that we should be content with this well balanced account; but remembering her quiet ways, her simple dress, and her scorn of self-indulgence, we feel that we ought to indicate by some sign the use she made of the earnings from her several employments. She had few ills of her own, but from her childhood she had been full of sympathy and tenderness for others who suffered. In her youth she gave to such *personal service*, out of the abundance of her strength, but later on she shared her *wages* with them, to a far greater advantage; and many now remember her best as the anxious friend who anticipated their wants.

Early in the winter of 1888, feeling that her strength was giving way, she resigned her chair at Vassar College, and retired as Professor Emerita. Other employments were relinquished. She returned to Lynn, and, after a very trying illness, she died there on the 28th of June of the same year.

#### THEODORE DWIGHT WOOLSEY.\*

THEODORE DWIGHT WOOLSEY was born in the city of New York, October 31, 1801. Both his parents were of English descent. His father, a prominent and successful merchant, sprung from a family which was early settled on Long Island. His mother, a sister of the first President Dwight, was a granddaughter of Jonathan Edwards. He was doubly connected with President Dwight, whose wife was a sister of his father. The relatives of President Woolsey were stanch Federalists of the Hamilton school. This was one of the influences which gave a highly conservative tone to his political feeling. He always felt a strong antipathy to Jefferson and his ideas of government. He disbelieved in the doctrine of universal suffrage. Dr. Woolsey was graduated at Yale College in 1820, when he received the highest honors of the class. On leaving college he spent a year in the study of law in the office of Mr. Charles Chauncey of Philadelphia, — a fruitful year in its influence on his subsequent literary life. Deciding to enter the ministry, he joined the Princeton Theological Seminary, which he left at the end of a year to become a Tutor in Yale. This return to New Haven was in 1823. While holding this office, he studied during another year in the Yale Theological School. In 1825 he was licensed to preach; but a distrust

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\* Not ready in time for the preceding Annual Report.